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ABSTRACT

To provide a differentiated language arts program to meet the needs of highly able and gifted readers and to encourage interest in reading and the development of state reading goals, students in the sixth grade of a middle school in Maryland were grouped by ability for their language arts/reading classes. Students were exposed to a wide variety of reading materials from a variety of publishers, rather than confined to a particular basal reading series. They also learned techniques to help them to read materials critically, and shared their interpretations in small group discussions. In addition, students were asked to select and develop creative projects to elaborate the ideas they gathered from their shared interpretive reading. Projects included sociograms, time machine models, newscasts, games based on story themes, development of floor plans to illustrate particular character traits, sample children's books, and simulation role playing activities. In response to a questionnaire to evaluate the program, 88% of the students stated that they had increased their understanding and appreciation of literature, 75% declared an increase in the amount of time spent reading, 56% disclosed that they had discussed the stories with others outside of class, and 40% reported further reading of stories by the authors presented in the program. (HOD)

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A Literature Program for the Gifted: Gifted Writers + Gifted Readers = Positive Reading Attitudes

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by

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Paper presented at the Ninth World Congress on Reading, July 27, 1982, Dublin, Ireland

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A major objective of reading programs is the development and maintenance of favorable attitudes toward reading. Most concern for attitude development has been directed toward the remedial reader. But what about the highly able and gifted readers? Are reading programs helping them develop an interest and appreciation of literature? Although it is recognized that gifted readers are motivated to read and spend a considerable amount of time reading (Witty, 1971), are these gifted readers increasing the amount of time spend reading?

In a study of the reading habits of students, ages 9, 13, and 17, conducted by the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature, a decline was shown in teenagers' abilities to analyze and identify literary works and characters (NAEP Report, 1981). The selection of reading as a leisure-time activity also declined as the students grew older. Reading was viewed by the students as an informational source, rather than an activity for enjoyment and self-understanding.

Mindall and Stracher (1980) stressed the need for gifted readers to share the experience of reading great literature. Huck (1979) described literature as a means for students to develop a new awareness and sensitivity to people and their surroundings. Gallagher (1975) noted the inclusion of literature into a language arts

curriculum as a popular technique of providing "additional stimulation for gifted students" (p.179).

In the state of Maryland, the Department of Education advocates that highly able readers become proficient in the state adopted goals of:

1. utilization of a variety of reading materials
2. usage of a word recognition system
3. comprehension of reading materials at the literal, critical, and creative thinking levels
4. achievement of meeting the reading demands for functioning in society
5. selection of reading as a personal activity

(MSDE, 1979)

The Highly Able Reader Guide suggests usage of both print and non-print materials and techniques; such as tapes, filmstrips, photography, dramatics, scripts, writing centers, and contracts. A balance of self-directed activities, interaction time, and teacher-directed activities is recommended. Development of critical and creative thinking skills and application of these skills to various content materials are also outlined as objectives of reading programs for the highly able and gifted reader.

How does the involvement of highly able and gifted readers in a literature program effect their attitudes toward reading? Can a literature program effect interest in reading and the amount of time spent reading?

Program Description

In an effort to provide a differentiated language arts program to meet the needs of the highly able and gifted readers and encourage interest in reading and and development of state reading goals, students in the sixth grade at General Smallwood Middle School in Charles County, Maryland, were grouped by ability for their language arts/reading classes. Students were selected to participate in the literature enrichment classes based on identification of intellectual abilities, specific academic aptitudes (such as verbal proficiency, critical and creative thinking abilities), academic achievement, and teacher recommendation. Thirty-two of the 262 sixth graders qualified for the program. Students were instructed by their regular classroom teacher, who teamed with the reading specialist and the media specialist three times per week for a 90 minute class period.

In this program, students were exposed to a wide variety of reading materials from a variety of publishers, rather than confined to a particular basal reading series. Students read such novels as Harriet The Spy, by Louise Fitzhugh, and From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, by E. L. Konisberg. Short stories by Jack London, Shirley Jackson, Hans Christian Anderson, Isaac Asimov, as well as student nominated authors were integrated into a literature

program that included mini-units on folklore, archaelogy, poetry, the newspaper, and animals. Students learned techniques to help them read materials critically, and shared their interpretations in small group discussions. In addition to their interpretive reading, students were asked to select and develop creative projects to elaborate the ideas they gathered from their shared interpretive reading. Projects included sociograms, time machine models, newscasts, construction of games based on story themes, development of floor plans to illustrate particular character traits, sample children's books, poems, and simulation-role playing activities. Examples of activities used to extend the basic curriculum are listed in the chart below.

Basic Skill	Elaboration Project
1. Writing an autobiography	1. Creation of a "Me Museum" or an archaeological dig summary of "Artifacts About Me"
2. Recognition of parts of a book, such as index, etc.	2. Students pretend they are a book, and identify their contents. Example: "I am a fabulous fiction book, finished in fine mink..."
3. Recognition of conflict	3. Students identify a conflict in current events

Basic Skill	Elaboration Project
	3. (continued) and express it in an animal theme. Example:"Reagan's economic proposals are similar to squeezing a hippo into a girdle."
4. Recognition and usage of editing symbols in writing	4. Students identify an editing symbol that best represents themselves. Development of a new symbol which they feel is needed is also assigned. Example: " # best describes me because my life is just beginning and I'm still growing." A new symbol needed is a rocket to point out sentences which are "off the subject."

Program Review

In June, the sixth graders were given a brief questionnaire to evaluate their response to the literature program. Eighty-eight percent of the students stated that they had increased their understanding and appreciation of literature. Seventy-five percent declared an increase

in the amount of time spent reading. Fifty-six percent disclosed that they had discussed the stories with others outside of class. Forty percent expressed further reading of stories by the authors presented in the program.

The data from the questionnaire indicates that the students did meet the state goals of reading a variety of materials and selecting reading as a personal activity. The students acknowledged verbally the complexity of the stories and noted the change from being in one particular reading book. Perhaps this transition influenced their continued selection of stories by the authors in the program. The basic skills were incorporated into the curriculum, with the emphasis placed on making reading less of a skill-related activity and more of a personal experience that could be shared and discussed. The students analyzed authors' viewpoints as well as their own feelings in their shared interpretive reading. Instruction encouraged students to personalize their reading experience and actively involve themselves in the reading process. A continuation of the enrichment literature class and an extension of the program to the seventh and eighth grade levels was recommended by the parent and teacher organization of the school.

Through the involvement of the highly able and gifted readers in the literature enrichment program, these students

improved their attitude toward reading and increased the amount of time they spent reading. The results from the questionnaire suggest that the methods and techniques used in teaching reading to the highly able and gifted reader play an important role in determining the success of a reading program. Perhaps this type of shared literature experiences could reduce the decline noted in the National Assessment of Reading and Literature, as well as provide a positive reading experience for highly able and gifted readers.

Teaching reading to the highly able and gifted reader involves much more than a skill-oriented approach. The interaction of the student with a variety of print, the involvement of the student in thinking critically and interpretively, and the opportunity for students to share and create ideas are important aspects in developing positive attitudes toward literature among the highly able and gifted reader.

ENRICHMENT LITERATURE QUESTIONNAIRE

n = 32

QUESTION	RESPONSE	
	YES	NO
1. Do you feel that your view (understanding and appreciation) of literature has improved this year through your participation in the literature program? ----------	88%	12%
2. Have you read any other books or stories by the authors (London, Anderson, etc.) this year? ----------	40%	60%
3. Did the amount of time you spend reading on a weekly or daily basis increase this school year? ----------	75%	25%
4. Did you discuss the stories you read with others (parents, friends) outside of class? ----------	56%	44%

5. Comments
   - I thought most of the stories were good.
   - A lot of the stories seemed sad.
   - I enjoyed reading and talking about the stories.
   - I liked doing all the projects.

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Title of article - "A Literature Program for the Gifted:
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intended audience - reading specialists, classroom teachers,
curriculum specialists, gr. 4-8

Abstract - This article presents an overview of a literature program for highly able and gifted readers in the regular classroom. Implementation of the program is discussed and suggested classroom activities included. A student questionnaire reveals that the involvement of gifted readers in shared-book experiences effects the development of positive attitudes toward reading and the selection of reading as a leisure-time activity.